

Name:  
Date:  
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## WALT WHITMAN

*SYNTHESIS FOCUS: EVALUATING CLAIMS OF PROGRESS*

### VOCABULARY

Recitative: Recital, recitation  
Panoply: full ceremonial dress  
Ponderous: slow and heavy

Tremulous: shaking, quivering  
Careering: rushing, speeding  
Muse: goddess of poetic inspiration

Buffeting: beating, battering  
Lawless: free, not following the laws of musical composition  
Unpent: unconfined

### TO A LOCOMOTIVE IN WINTER

THEE for my recitative!  
Thee in the driving storm, even as now—the snow—the winter-day declining;  
Thee in thy panoply, thy measured dual throbbing, and thy beat convulsive;  
Thy black cylindric body, golden brass, and silvery steel;  
Thy ponderous side-bars, parallel and connecting rods, gyrating, shuttling at thy sides; 5  
Thy metrical, now swelling pant and roar—now tapering in the distance;  
Thy great protruding head-light, fix'd in front;  
Thy long, pale, floating vapor-pennants, tinged with delicate purple;  
The dense and murky clouds out-belching from thy smoke-stack;  
Thy knitted frame—thy springs and valves—the tremulous twinkle of thy wheels; 10  
Thy train of cars behind, obedient, merrily-following,  
Through gale or calm, now swift, now slack, yet steadily careering:  
Type of the modern! emblem of motion and power! pulse of the continent!  
For once, come serve the Muse, and merge in verse, even as here I see thee,  
With storm, and buffeting gusts of wind, and falling snow; 15  
By day, thy warning, ringing bell to sound its notes,  
By night, thy silent signal lamps to swing.

Fierce-throated beauty!  
Roll through my chant, with all thy lawless music! thy swinging lamps at night;  
Thy piercing, madly-whistled laughter! thy echoes, rumbling like an earthquake, rousing 20  
all!  
Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding;  
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine.)  
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return'd,  
Launch'd o'er the prairies wide—across the lakes,  
To the free skies, unpent, and glad, and strong. 25

### DEMOCRATIC VISTAS

America, filling the present with greatest deeds and problems, cheerfully accepting the past, including feudalism, (as, indeed, the present is but the legitimate birth of the past, including feudalism,) counts, as I reckon, for her justification and success. (for who, as yet, dare claim success?) almost entirely on the future. Nor is that hope unwarranted. To-day, ahead, though dimly yet, we see, in vistas, a copious, sane, gigantic offspring. For our New World I consider far less important for what it has done, or what it is, than for results to come. Sole among nationalities, these States have assumed the task to put in forms of lasting power and practicality, on areas of amplitude rivaling the operations of the physical kosmos, the moral political speculations of ages, long, long deferr'd, the democratic republican principle, and the theory of development and perfection by voluntary standards, and self-reliance. Who else, indeed, except the United States, in history, so far, have accepted in unwitting faith, and, as we now see, stand, act upon, and go security for, these things?

But precluding no longer, let me strike the key-note of the following strain. First premising that, though the passages of it have been written at widely different times, (it is, in fact, a collection of memoranda, perhaps for future designers, comprehenders,) and though it may be open to the charge of one part contradicting another -- for there are opposite sides to the great question of democracy, as to every great question -- I feel the parts harmoniously blended in my own realization and convictions, and present them

to be read only in such oneness, each page and each claim and assertion modified and temper'd by the others. Bear in mind, too, that they are not the result of studying up in political economy, but of the ordinary sense, observing, wandering among men, these States, these stirring years of war and peace. I will not gloss over the appalling dangers of universal suffrage in the United States. In fact, it is to admit and face these dangers I am writing. To him or her within whose thought rages the battle, advancing, retreating, between democracy's convictions, aspirations, and the people's crudeness, vice, caprices, I mainly write this essay. I shall use the words America and democracy as convertible terms. Not an ordinary one is the issue. The United States are destined either to surmount the gorgeous history of feudalism, or else prove the most tremendous failure of time. Not the least doubtful am I on any prospects of their material success. The triumphant future of their business, geographic and productive departments, on larger scales and in more varieties than ever, is certain. In those respects the republic must soon (if she does not already) outstrip all examples hitherto afforded, and dominate the world.

Admitting all this, with the priceless value of our political institutions, general suffrage, (and fully acknowledging the latest, widest opening of the doors,) I say that, far deeper than these, what finally and only is to make of our western world a nationality superior to any hitherto known, and out-topping the past, must be vigorous, yet unsuspected Literatures, perfect personalities and sociologies, original, transcendental, and expressing (what, in highest sense, are not yet express'd at all,) democracy and the modern. With these, and out of these, I promulge new races of Teachers, and of perfect Women, indispensable to endow the birth-stock of a New World. For feudalism, caste, the ecclesiastic traditions, though palpably retreating from political institutions, still hold essentially, by their spirit, even in this country, entire possession of the more important fields, indeed the very subsoil, of education, and of social standards and literature.

I say that democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences. It is curious to me that while so many voices, pens, minds, in the press, lecture-rooms, in our Congress, &c., are discussing intellectual topics, pecuniary dangers, legislative problems, the suffrage, tariff and labor questions, and the various business and benevolent needs of America, with propositions, remedies, often worth deep attention, there is one need, a hiatus the profoundest, that no eye seems to perceive, no voice to state. Our fundamental want-to-day in the United States, with closest, amplest reference to present conditions, and to the future, is of a class, and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of American mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new breath of life, giving it decision, affecting politics far more than the popular superficial suffrage, with results inside and underneath the elections of Presidents or Congresses -- radiating, begetting appropriate teachers, schools, manners, and, as its grandest result, accomplishing, (what neither the schools nor the churches and their clergy have hitherto accomplish'd, and without which this nation will no more stand, permanently, soundly, than a house will stand without a substratum,) a religious and moral character beneath the political and productive and intellectual bases of the States. For know you not, dear, earnest reader, that the people of our land may all read and write, and may all possess the right to vote -- and yet the main things may be entirely lacking? -- (and this to suggest them.)

View'd, to-day, from a point of view sufficiently over-arching, the problem of humanity all over the civilized world is social and religious, and is to be finally met and treated by literature. The priest departs, the divine literatus comes. Never was anything more wanted than, to-day, and here in the States, the poet of the modern is wanted, or the great literatus of the modern. At all times, perhaps, the central point in any nation, and that whence it is itself really sway'd the most, and whence it sways others, is its national literature, especially its archetypal poems. Above all previous lands, a great original literature is surely to become the justification and reliance, (in some respects the sole reliance,) of American democracy.

#### VOCABULARY:

Sole: alone  
Amplitude: range, abundance  
Go Security: post bond  
Preluding: giving the introduction  
Strain: theme  
Premising: postulating, assuming  
Gloss Over: whitewash  
Suffrage: voting rights  
Convertible: interchangeable

Hitherto: previously  
Transcendental: surpassing, idealistic  
Promulge: proclaim  
Endow: supply  
Ecclesiastic: churchly, clerical  
Palpably: manifestly, obviously  
Cavil: trivial objection, quibble  
Pecuniary: financial, monetary  
Benevolent: charitable, philanthropic

Hiatus: gap  
Want: need, lack  
Sacerdotal: priestly  
Substratum: foundation  
Literatus: intellectual  
Whence: from which source or cause  
Archetypal: original